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GLENN UNGEWITTER

This is an oral history of Glenn Ungewitter, 401 Wilson Rd., Sebastopol, CA. Interviewer is Arlene Houghton, 734 Litchfield Ave., Sebastopol. May 20, 1992. I am interviewing Glenn, because his father, George was in partnership with George Ragle at Ragle Ranch in the 1920s and 1930s.

Arlene: I wanted to ask you your name.

Glenn: Glenn Ungewitter, 401 Wilson Rd. Sebastopol, 823-3796.

A: What is your ethnic background?

G: Straight German.

A: Your mother's maiden name?

G: Holst, Mabel

A: Your father's name?

G: George

A: Your grandparents names?

G: On my father's side it was Bill and Mary Ungewitter. On my mother's side it was Henry Holst and Molly Samuels Holst.

A: And where did you go to elementary school?

G: Spring Hill. It was a grammar school, 1st to 8th. And then to Analy.

A: After it was rebuilt?

G: Yeah.

A: And were you a farmer all of your life?

G: A livestock dealer. The last eight years I have worked for Bob Maddox Construction.

A: And now I wanted to get into the history of Ragle.

Do you know anything about it when it was a landgrant?

G: No

A: Do you know when George Ragle bought it?

G: George Ragle never did buy it. His grandmother owned it. And she willed it to him. On her death she willed it to him that he had the ranch for the rest of his life. But upon his death it was to go to her heirs. I guess she never figured that he was going to live so long and so George moved off the ranch like probably 1960 and then he quit paying taxes on it. No, he quit paying taxes on it like in '55. And then it went to the county because you could never buy it from her heirs because her heirs' heirs became heirs, so it was like probably 150+ (people) in that.

A: What was her name?

G: I can't remember

A: Was she a Ragle?

G: Yeah, she was.

A: So, she bought it originally?

G: Well, her and her husband. I think that her husband died probably a fairly young man. But their son's name was Alex, George's father.

A: When did the partnership between your father and George Ragle begin?

G: Probably about 1917.

A: And what was the purpose of the partnership?

G: They were partners in farming. They had the dairy there and they diversified farming.

A: And can you describe where the house was?

G: You know where that redwood tree is and the gazebo is? That's where the house was.

A: Can you describe the house?

G: It was all redwood. It had a lot of rooms in it. They were all small rooms. I never could understand why they were all such small rooms. It had an upstairs in it.

A: Was it Victorian looking?

G: No, it was just a nice house. There was nothing fancy about it. And it had a good size basement in it, the wine cellar. I'm not sure but I think that I can remember going over there when they first got PG & E in there. They took and wired it and got PG & E. I was collecting them pins out of the top of the poles when they used to drive them in and put the year in them. And I'm not sure but I got one there that said 1929, but I wasn't born until 34 and I know that when my dad was on the ranch with them they took milking machines but they were run with gas engines. There was no electricity.

A: I should get you to describe the ranching operation at the time.

G: It's hard to tell you how the land laid now unless you walk through it. I could tell you right where the fences are and everything. The front part of the ranch out there where the parking lot and diamonds are, that was all potatoes. They planted potatoes in there, that was that sandy soil. And then they planted corn for silage down in the bottom and on the west side where the ranger's cabin is there now, just directly opposite that, that was a family orchard in there. That was all an orchard.

A: Oh, that's why I see the pears/While/ walking up the hill.

G: And on the north side of that you can see the last row of pears there, from there on over, there's a ditch

that goes on through there. The drain from all that up there runs down the hill. O.K. on the west side of that there is a big crown. And that was all berries, tame berries. But they took and had Mammoth berries planted in there. And then way out over to the north side of that where there is an old pond, you can see where they cut down locust trees around it. Now that was a fishpond and they took and...There was a child named Jep?? that lived on the ranch and he caught the fish and took them down to Chinatown and sold them. I guess that was probably the most profitable thing on the whole ranch - the fish pond.

A: How about that other little pond, the year-round pond down there that I've seen people swimming in now, on this side of the park?

G: You mean the creek, down by the forks? That's Atascadero and Ragle Slough.

A: Did your family dig that out, the year-round pond?

G: That was always a good sized pond, in fact it's gotten smaller. That used to be a big hole. The vineyard down here, they opened it up, so that narrowed it down there because there isn't near the water that used to run through there. And then the slough it used to be deeper and then it didn't have all that vegetation growing on the banks. The cows kept the vegetation down. And the berry bushes that have grown up in there are so thick that rabbits don't even use it anymore. I don't see why the park (doesn't clear it off). They had a fire down there a couple years ago. We used to take it and burn it off every year, on purpose.

A: Then I was going to ask you about that (water). You said

It was not Atascadero Creek. Was it Ragle Slough that your father dug out?

G: It's Atascadero Water Shed. That's how we knew it.

A: So your dad dug that out with George Ragle?

G: With George Ragle and Savio Elgin (?).

A: What machines did they use or tools did they use to dig that slough?

G: Horses and a slip sweeper.

A: Can you tell me anything else about that whole process?

G: (They did it) to drain the flats because if you don't keep your creeks open, your creek bank gets higher then away from the creek. Like if you've got flats then every time there is a flood, the silt comes up and the water is going on through, the silt comes up and it don't go into the stream and catch and carry it on down. And it will build your banks up. So that leaves your banks getting higher and it will slope on out into the flats. So eventually all you've got is just a big marsh out here and no drainage through it. That's what will happen down here now that they've never taken...

A: I wanted to find out too, I did hear about that last cattle drive that your dad, was it your dad?

G: It was dad and george Ragle who drove 100 cows over there in the back of Kenwood, on the East side of Kenwood, back of the Los Guillicos School for Girls and they took and brought it through Santa Rosa down Fourth Street. It was probably around 1920 or so.

A: They were on horseback?

G: Oh yeah. That wasn't much of a drive. They used to drive cows down from Point Arena.

A: Was the street paved?

G: Fourth Street would have been paved, I believe.

A: So there were homes there then?

G: Oh yeah, it was up to the store owners to keep them from going...They were dairy cows. They weren't range cows or anything. They are pretty easy to keep under control.

A: So you were born in what year?

G: 1934.

A: And so this was the last cattle drive?

G: It's the last one that we know of that went down 4th Street.

A: They all drove down 4th Street?

G: Well, see, the old slaughter house was on College Avenue, so they would have to come in on that way for all the butcher stuff. You asked me when my dad and George were first partners. They may have been in grammar school when they were first partners. They went in partners on a hog for boor service to use for breeding sows and stuff and it came in by rail from Nebraska or Iowa or some place and my dad and George they took a wagon over there to get it and it was there in the crate and that crate was built so good, that they put axles under it and they used that to deliver the boor to rent it out.

A: So how old do you think they were then?

G: They were probably around 13 or 14.

A: Can you tell me when the partnership ended?

G: About 1930.

A: Do you know why it ended?

G: No, not really.

A: Was there a fight?

G: No, there was never a fight between my dad and George Ragle. My dad and George, there were never any bad words (between them). It was over some of her family (George's wife) who wanted to go hunting down there (Ragle). My dad was quite a hunter and he was jealous of anybody hunting (there). It was his territory down there, nobody else's. So she took and give her family, you know they were from Petaluma or something, they went up here and went hunting and my dad told them to get off the place. And they said that they didn't have to get off the place. That she owned it and they had permission and that's what broke up the partnership.

A: But they remained good friends (George and Glenn's dad)?

G: Oh yeah, my dad turned around and rented the ranch and we had it until the park took over.

A: And tell me about that because I know that Tom (Meyskens) (the park ranger there at the time) told me that when I knew the park, when I moved here 20 years ago, it was pretty natural then. It hadn't been developed or anything. And I remember the cows. Did you lease it then?

G: Yes, I leased it then. Well, when I first started, after George lost it to the tax-deeded land, then I rented it from the tax-deeded land from the State of California. And then a guy named Polk, he retired out a tax-deeded land and Polk, Talerico and Smith, they were on the _____????

A: Afterwards? From the county?

G: No, it's from the state of California.

A: How could they own it? You don't know? And how did it become county?

G: The county bought it from Polk, Talerico and Smith.

A: And you don't know how they got it from the state?

G: Well, they said they bought it through...It was supposed to be auctioned off from the county courthouse steps but there never was a sale. They said that they had bought out heirs and stuff. And there were a few of the heirs that received money off of it, but nothing like what (it was worth). Because I never could understand, here the state owned it and they turned around and gave it to Talerico and Polk and Smith and then the county buys it from them. I mean I never could understand - James K. Polk, yeah, he was with the tax-deeded land.

A: Do you know when that was? Was it after the 1960's?

G: Probably 65, cause I rented it from the state for quite a while, the tax-deeded land. Alan Cranston, that's who I wrote the check out to.

A: So do you know when the county got it then?

G: In fact I've got a lease in there on the desk, as long as this bottom is not developed, I've got a lease on it. But it's not honored. They don't honor it.

A: I was a trail walker (at Ragle) and I do know that a lot of the farmers said that the birds were not nesting because the dogs were running loose (on the lower undeveloped part of Ragle).

G: When we had that ranch we killed about 20-30 buzzards a year because we kept everybody's dogs out of there and everybody out of there. And some years you wouldn't kill a deer and other years you'd kill two or three of them. I mean if there was a lot of deer, you'd kill some and if there wasn't any deer you wouldn't kill them. The same way with pheasants.

There have been years when we didn't even hunt pheasants. We hunted quail almost every year. But now they've got so many people walking through there and one of the council women said that we had a meeting over there and she was telling how we had get the cattle out of there because the cattle were stepping on the birds' nests and destroying the birds' nests. I had never seen a footprint in a pheasant's nest, or a duck's nest. We used to have at least 30 pair of ducks nesting there a year. There were a pair of cinnamon teal that came in there every year from the first time that I ever walked down there in the spring. And I went down there this year and last year to see if they were in there, and they weren't around. But it's just that, we can sit at my son's house and you can tell every time a duck gets scared off its nest because she starts quacking. It's not any animals that has done the wildfowl any harm. It's the human beings. You can't take and try and control wild animals. When you take and have dogs running through, people running through, you are disturbing their natural habitat. Just like this crap down here about the Laguna and everything. And the best way to take and mess up wildlife and everything is let the Department of Fish and Game come in there and control (it). If any department needs investigation, it is that one. Just because they go through school and come out with a degree, that degree, to my notion, it don't mean nothing. If you live with the animals and keep an eye on them you'll take a lot better care of them. You can't learn about animals out of a book.

A: Can you tell me about the personalities of George Ragle and his father?

G: George, he was a big man. And strong. But then later on in life, he got crippled up from things he had done when he was younger, like picking up one sack of grain. That wasn't enough for him, he had to pick up two. He could do it and he just wanted to show people that he could do it. And I remember my dad telling me a story that down at the freight depot one time these three guys were trying to roll a barrel up a ramp and my dad and George was walking by there and he says, "Well, don't roll it up onto the platform, take it up and put it there". So they said, "Oh, yeah, you go ahead and try it". So dad says "Well, we can pick it up and put it up there. George can do it by himself". So this one guy says they would bet a fifth or a quart of whiskey that he couldn't do it. Then George went over there and picked it up. It was like 400 lbs. He picked it up and put it up there on the loading dock. But he was a powerful man, but I don't think he ever got in a fight in his life. And he was a guy that in every sentence he said a cuss word but you never heard him say a vulgar word in his (life). I mean he could say you know, just cuss, but if the pope was there, he would not recognize him cussing I think. Because that's the way that he talked. I only saw George Ragle mad one time in my life. But when he cussed then, you knew that he was cussing, it sounded like swear words then. Most everybody around here, later on after we leased the ranch and anything, he didn't have anything to do on the ranch and he was crippled up.

A: Oh, he was still there?

G: Oh, yeah, he lived there until the 1960's, and then he moved into town over on Burnett Street. But I think it was '55 that he quit paying the taxes.

A: Do you know why he did that?

G: He didn't get clear title to it or anything. As long as he paid taxes on it, he had a place to live and farm.

A: So he had children too?

G: No.

A: So, I guess he figured, well he may as well just let it go.

G: See, I think Rita died in 1937 or something like that.

A: And do you know what year George died?

G: I think 1962 or 1964.

A: How about your father, what was he like?

G: He was a smaller man than George Ragle and had a temper, real easy to get mad. And he did it quite often. There wasn't anything that he wouldn't do for somebody. He was the one that when got got mad, you would step aside.

A: Has this house been in your family for a while?

G: My dad and mother built this house in '27. (1927) See they moved from Ragle Ranch over here in '27. They moved that house out from (of Ragle) where the redwood tree is?, between the two soccer fields? The path goes down to that little pond. You know where that redwood tree is out towards Ragle Road? That's where my mother and dad lived. I think that was the original Ragle house. That was kind of a shack kind of a house. It was kind of a large cabin.

A: So they moved there when they were first married?

G: No, they came from Lake County down (here). My dad had the cigar store down there in town, where Jack's - Old Main Saloon now is, over by Carlson's. My dad had that when he and my mother got married. And then they took and moved to Lake County and took and got a bar up by Kelseyville, a pool hall.

There was, I guess, bootleg whiskey too. And so George Ragle was coming up there deer hunting all the time, going hunting and stuff. So he finally talked my dad into coming on down and being partners with him on Ragle. This was after my dad and mother were married.

A: So they had already known each other from the time they were 14?

G: Oh yeah, they went to school up there together.

A: Oh, they went to school up there in Kelseyville?

G: No, Spring Hill. See, my mother and dad got married in 1912. My dad was born in that house that's right up there on the road. When my dad and mother got married in 1912, they went up to Lake County. My dad sold the pool hall where Old Main Saloon is.

A: So they knew each other in school, they moved to Lake County and reconnected in Lake County?

G: No, they were friends all the time. George would come up there and go hunting with my dad. Then they moved to the cabin on Ragle. Then in '27 my folks built this house.

A: Did they already have children when they moved to the cabin?

G: Yeah, Don and Dorothy and my sister Marian was born in '27, the same year that this (house) was built. But this was made out of all old used lumber. They tore a house down that my aunt had across the valley over there and hauled it over here with a wagon. You can even see on the siding the putty holes and such.

A: So then you were born here?

G: Right here.

A: So your mom had all her children at home?

G: Yeah, they were all born at home.

A: That must be neat to be in the same house you were born in.

G: You never think about it. What I think more about now, is going down the road and thinking about who lived there and everything and you don't know where they've gone. Sebastopol has changed in the last eight years. The hippies were bad. But I'll tell you what. These things they call Yuppies now. They are worse than the hippies ever thought of being. If you got your BMW and a $300,000 mortgage, then you are the king. I haven't seen a healthy looking one yet.

A: Can you tell me anything else about Ragle, your remembrances, that we haven't talked about. And your great-grandparents who came over with the Donner Party, do you know the name?

G: George Donner.

A: He was the head, wasn't he?

G: No, Jacob Donner was George Junior's father. Jacob Donner was my great-grandfather. But he was only 9 years old (during the crossing of the Sierras). George and Jacob were brothers. George was the head of the party. And his brother Jacob, it was their party. But Jacob had a son named George Junior. That was my grandmother's father.

A: Have any personal tales come down to you from that? What happened to him after he settled here?

G: They went to San Jose first and came up here in the early 50's and they got this property here that went from Bodega Highway down to Mill Station Road and everything west of Ragle.

A: This part too?

G: Yeah, down to Ferguson Road and then there was McChristian's who owned that square in there. See, it was just Ragle and

Donner and McChristians that had this square in here originally, I guess.

A: So did your grandparents tell you anything about the Donner party that you can remember now?

G: Oh, they would tell us stuff that went in one ear and out the other. We had quite a bit of stuff around here like there's a black snake out there that they boiled and ate soup out of. You know what a black snake is? An ox whip. And it was made out of rawhide and they put that in the water and boiled it and made soup out of it and ate the broth off of that. My dad give a lot of stuff to the Sonoma Museum in Vellejo. General Vallejo's house.

A; Have you been to the museum up by Donner Summit?

G: Yeah.

A: Is any of the stuff there?

G: There wasn't really very much. I think Patty Reed's doll is there. And there's some spoons that were rusted out. There were several muzzle loading guns that he took (his father took them to the museum in Vellejo). The first guy that I talked to said that they shipped it to Sutter's Fort in Sacramento. I went up there and that place is something else. I've got a branding iron that was built in Sutter's Fort. It was registered to a John Sinclair. And the wife and kids and I paid a visit and I took and it's either 7 or 11 of the brands that was registered there at Sutter's Fort with John Sutter. And I looked at this one. It's a J with a lazy S on it. And I told the wife, jeez, I've got that brand. And she thought that I said that we've got a cow with that brand on it. So then I talked to one of those Smokeys and I told him that I had a branding iron that came

from Sutter's Fort. And he looked at me and I said that I'll donate it to you. He tells me, yeah, everybody does. And just turned around and walked off.

A: Do you still have it?

G: Yeah, and I have an arrowhead collection that the kids took to school. And they never took it without something disappearing and the teachers said they kept an eye on it and everything. There was an obsidian awl there.

A: Did you find your stuff over at Ragle. The Native American artifacts? There is a site by the bridge - the first bridge in the lower part of Ragle when you go where the big house and all the blackberries are?

G: Yeah, we found a lot of the arrowheads in there.

A: Do you know of any other sites?

G: Well, it's not in Ragle Ranch, but on the other side. It's so recent that there's clam shells and stuff there.

A: That's called a midden where they threw the shells, like their trash.

G: Around the hill, like below the Hall ?? place, there's a camp there.

A: Where's that?

G: That was Alexander Ragle's place. It's on the south side of the ranch. At the gazebo, you look out, and you look south and west, there's an old house there, the old Clayton house. That's Alex Ragle's house, that's George's father's place. And there's a (Native American) site there. Quite a ways from the house. They always put their camps below the wind on the hill and wherever there was a stream. They are pretty well dug up.

A: Obviously, your family has been a part of Sebastopol's history for a long time. Do you have any other relatives, or other parts of Sebastopol history that you would like to share about?

G: I guess our family has never been a big family. We've got relatives around, but they moved off. My dad's mother's father died in San Jose. That was George Donner Junior who wasn't a junior. I don't know why they did that (named him that).

A: So your family was a pretty small family here.

G: Well, in the Donners there was Cora Donner, Mary Donner, another George Donner, JohnDonner, Frank Donner and an Albert Donner. So there were six of them on my dad's mother's side. But Ungewitters, they were from Cazadero. This Historical Atlas (which Glenn had at the house) I think it's '74 (1874) and it's got property up there in Guerneville that Ungewitters had, and that was my dad's grandfather who had a place up there.

A: And did they come from the East originally?

G: Illinois. 1846 was when they start ed and they wintered up there and come out in '47, but they all spoke English.

A: Talking about George Donner Junior, you said that he would never eat at the dinner table at Thanksgiving?

G: He would never eat at any big dinner or anything that had to do with food, like a wedding or something. They would all have this big dinner or something and he would just dissolve - he'd get away. They knew what starving was, but not death, not quite death.

A: Someone said to me that the people who led them didn't know what they were doing?

G: Not really, religion is what kept them. They were pretty

religious people. And they prayed every night and stopped the wagons and arranged for prayer. Sundays they would never make a hitch - it was their own fault and they started later in the season than they should have. But just by traveling right on cue and making up for their Sundays that they didn't do anything, that may have got them over. If they had traveled maybe 2 1/2 hours a night instead of making prayer.

A: (later) Now we are talking about during the Second World War. Can you tell me about this (in Sebastopol)?

G: There was a tank division out at O'Farrell's Hill - Yeah, that was the old CC camp. That was infantry, Army. At Windsor, that was an army base and they were flying out of there. Up there where the airport is now. And the Navy training was over here on Old Sebastopol Road. You know from Llano Road down to where the freeway begins on Highway 12, that strip was built there for an emergency landing strip, that wasn't built for a highway, but for an emergency landing strip in case the one got bombed out over here. That's what they used to say all the time. But I don't know why they built it so wide for the cars in them days.

A: But didn't there used to be a little landing field around there anyway?

G: Right here at the old service station at the Laguna? Yeah, that's the old landing strip. But that was just a cow pasture. But the hangar and stuff was where they had all the equipment for the auto wreckers (Ford Auto Wreckers).

A: Were your parents affected by the Depression?

G: Oh yeah, see my dad had the dairy. And he had a dairy delivery and people couldn't afford to pay for the milk. And

my dad milked the cows and they delivered the mild by truck and he took and pruned apple trees during the day to get money to buy staples with. He worked for $.14 per hour pruning. So Then they wanted to put two new trucks on the (milk) route and the bank would only loan my dad $7.00 per cow. The route was called Green Valley Dairies. They had this dairy here and we pulled milk out of Burnside and Llano Roads.

A: For young people who have never had milk delivered to their house, can you describe what it was like?

G: (The milk was in glass bottles) They were put in wire racks, the milk cases. It was door-to-door (delivery) too. The cream (was on) the top (of the milk) too. Especially if you were drinking jersey milk. Cause holstein was always kind of bluish. A cream bottle, a quart cream bottle, it actually had a cream storage built into the bottle. And if you left the cap off (make of paper), it would crust right over and it looked like snot really. We always had cows here and we had skim creaming. My mother would run it from the bucket, she would run it on through like a table cloth into the skimming pans and they were pans 2 1/2 inches deep and 16 inches across and then you would take the spoon, wood, and scrape the side and pour it into the cream jar and take them and churn butter. We used to make all our own cheese. We have a cheese closet out there.

A: What is a cheese closet? I think we have one in our house.

G: Cheese closet? It runs all the way through from the floor to the attic and screen in it (top and bottom). And you let the cold air from the floor and the hot air goes out the top. A lot of houses had little pantry cupboards. And then it was always a double floor. The floor of the building had holes

in it about four inches out. And there was another set of holes in it. And then there's slats there. There's not just plywood with holes in it. There's like 1 x 1 slats.

A: So the cheeses were put into there to age?

G: To mold, yeah. It was a Monterey Jack cheese, but it had a flavor to it. We made our own cheese and butter and smoked our own hams and bacon. And we always raised beans and planted potatoes to sell, butchered our own beef over at Ragle because there was a slaughter house there. It was located where the backstop of the Little League is, if you go south of where that is, on past that. Where they dump the lawn trimmings and such. We had a big scalding vat for scalding hogs and it had a windlass in it. My sister has a picture of the barn (she died). My newphew has it now. But the barn had already gone to pieces. Somebody from the park wanted me to take and draw the outline of the buildings on it. A layout of the park. I didn't do it. I was always going to do it. A lot of them were bulldozed around, like where the peace garden is, that was a bull pen.

A: Any other buildings?

G: I think there was a 32-cow barn that were head-to-head, so 16 cows on each side. And there were two big silos there. I guess they were about the first upright silos in this county. And there was a little railroad track, like we had in dry yards, it fed down through the barn on one side and it went on out to where the silo was and so you opened the shute and filled it up and then you fed back going the other end and so the silo was on the other end of the barn. In fact

it was four silos on that place, four uprights and a big corn crib. And a nice old barn.

A: How much acreage was there?

G: There is 187 now, but we always thought there was 200 on it. And then well, George Ragle, he was a drinking man. But if anybody in this county tells me he saw that man drunk, I'll call him a liar. Because they never saw George Ragle drunk. He took and made a trip into town in the early afternoon and went to the bar and had 2-3 glasses of wine. So he sat there all afternoon reminiscining. So them A-holes who never went into the bar, they figured geez, George Ragle, he's the town drunk. He never (was). He'd have 3-4 glasses of wine and he could drink a ton of it, he was a big man. And if he was such a drunk like a lot of these people say, then the cops sure as hell weren't doing their job by letting them get out in the car and drive home. He was crippled besides, then, you know. He walked with a cane. There was one person who supposedly was a relation of his, he was telling me what a drunk he was. It rubbed me the wrong way. The guy's dead and can't protect himself. And I don't believe he knew enough to even say anything about him. He was like a father to me. I was 19 when my dad died and any advice that I needed, I went to George Ragle. And he could doctor a cow better than any of the vets that are around right now. And he didn't send me a bill of $300 for a $160 sick cow. He was just like a father.